Unit .01

Session .04

Sin and God's Grace

Scripture

Genesis 6:5-9, 17-22; 9:1,12-15

5 When the Lord saw that human wickedness was
widespread on the earth and that every inclination of
the human mind was nothing but evil all the time,
6 the Lord regretted that he had made man on the
earth, and he was deeply grieved. **7** Then the Lord
said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I created, off the face
of the earth, together with the animals, creatures that
crawl, and birds of the sky—for I regret that I made
them." **8** Noah, however, found favor with the Lord.
9 These are the family records of Noah. Noah was a
righteous man, blameless among his contemporaries;
Noah walked with God. … **17** "Understand that I am
bringing a flood—floodwaters on the earth to destroy
every creature under heaven with the breath of life in it.
Everything on earth will perish. **18** But I will establish
my covenant with you, and you will enter the ark with
your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives. **19** You are
also to bring into the ark two of all the living creatures,
male and female, to keep them alive with you. **20** Two
of everything—from the birds according to their kinds,
from the livestock according to their kinds, and from
the animals that crawl on the ground according to
their kinds—will come to you so that you can keep
them alive. **21** Take with you every kind of food
that is eaten; gather it as food for you and for them."
22 And Noah did this. He did everything that God
had commanded him. …**1** God blessed Noah and his
sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and
fill the earth." … **12** And God said, "This is the sign
of the covenant I am making between me and you and
every living creature with you, a covenant for all future
generations: **13** I have placed my bow in the clouds,
and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and
the earth. **14** Whenever I form clouds over the earth
and the bow appears in the clouds, **15** I will remember
my covenant between me and you and all the living
creatures: water will never again become a flood to
destroy every creature."

Intro Options

Main Point:
God judges sin and provides salvation to those who trust Him.

Option 1

Tell students to imagine the world has undergone a Zombie Apocalypse (or a similar worldwide disaster). Whatever the disaster, a cure has been found and saved the world (cured the disease, transformed the zombies back to humans, etc.).

An unexpected benefit has come of this cure. A wonderful change has come over all human beings. Students' job is to choose what the wonderful unintended consequence was, and to show a day in a normal person's life after the consequence came. Maybe people gained super powers, people became highly intelligent, or colds no longer exist, or people can't be hurt in accidents or sports. Place students into groups and allow a few minutes for them to come up with a consequence. Then, instruct students to present their consequence and why it's good.

Discuss how this cure brought about something better than anticipated and made the world better. Explain that God's grace to us in Jesus (the cure) not only spares us from judgment, but also brings us into favor with God. God's grace not only pardons us from God's judgment against sin, but actually transforms us into God's adoptive children. Explain that the story of Noah is a reminder of how the grace and favor of God not only protects us, but brings us into a new loving relationship with Him.

Option 2

Before class begins, print out or locate Online several pictures of dog owners who look like their pets. Show these to your students and ask them what specific characteristics stand out between the owner and the pet.

Afterwards, invite students to identify physical features or personality traits they or their siblings have inherited or adapted from their parents. (As a word of caution, please be sensitive to asking this question due to the various family contexts that may be represented in your group.) Examples may include physical features like hair or eye color, or perhaps personality similarities like a shared sense of humor or a fierce loyalty to a certain college football team, etc. After discussing, use this as an opportunity to remind students that all people inherited the problem of sin from Adam. But we have hope. Even though sin entered the world through one man, salvation also entered through one man: Jesus Christ.

So far in our study of Genesis, we've seen how God created the heavens and the earth and moved on to His most precious creation: human beings, made in His image. Adam and Eve sinned by choosing not to believe and trust the goodness of God's Word. Sin became an epidemic, not something that could be quarantined in the hearts of our first parents. This sin sickness spread to their children, and as it spread, it began to show up in increasingly wicked ways.

TEACHING PLAN

After humanity's fall into sin and sin spread through the first family, the storyline continues to unfold by introducing us to one of the most well-known characters in the Bible: Noah. Between Genesis 3 and 6, sin spread wide and sin spread deep. What *would* God do in response? What *could* He do in response?

Read Genesis 6:5-7.

The text says God "was deeply grieved" over this entire situation. The Hebrew word used here means *wounded*, *pained*, or *heartbroken*. In Isaiah 54:6, the prophet used the same word to describe the feeling a wife would have if her husband abandoned her. Honestly, it's a strange word to use when talking about God, because it makes Him sound incredibly vulnerable. God was not just angry over sin, but grieved and heartbroken by it. Sin is never primarily about breaking rules, but about wounding a relationship. When we sin, we betray our loving God and break His heart.

- **The Bible tells us God grieved before His judgment took place. What does this tell us about His character and how He views sin in our lives?**

Our instinctive response to this is to wonder if God has gone a bit too far. It doesn't seem befitting of a loving God to purge the earth like this. But consider what you might do if someone you love was being ravaged by cancer. You would take radical measures (like chemotherapy) to cleanse them from the cancer—not in spite of your love for them, but *because* of that love. That's precisely what God does with His creation. He loves it too much to let the cancer of our sin spread another inch.

- **Sin isn't about breaking rules, it's about breaking God's heart. How does this help us understand sin or change our attitudes toward it?**
- **List five things that might break God's heart today. How does this help you recognize His patience with His people?**

Activity

Tell students to pretend they are part of God's campaign team during the time of Noah. People often struggle with the biblical idea of judgment, students' job is to create some campaign posters, website banners, mottos, or jingles to explain judgment. They should show people why God's judgment of sin is not only good and necessary, but also loving because God provided a way for us to be made right before Him and escape judgment. They should focus on the main point of the lesson, that God judges sin and provides salvation to those who trust Him.

Read Genesis 6:8-9,17-22.

One of the reasons we have a difficult time understanding the Old Testament is that we tend to think God operated differently back then. We think that New Testament people were saved by grace, but Old Testament people were saved by doing good works. And there's the problem; there has only ever been one path to righteousness—the absolute surrender of faith.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God judges sin and provides salvation to those who trust Him.

Genesis 6

6:5-7. Modern readers often object to stories of God's judgment. They read about the violence and destruction, and whether they can articulate it well or not, they simply know: This bothers me. What is striking at the beginning of Noah's story is that what bothers us bothers God much more.

Sin, like a disease, had consumed humanity. Sexual perversion was widely accepted (Gen. 6:1–4). Violence was everywhere, as the strong used their position to oppress the weak (Gen. 6:12). So God determined to stop the corruption, sending a flood literally to cleanse the earth.

Perhaps you are still asking, "Really, though? Was it that severe? I can accept the idea of divine correction, but outright judgment and wrath? Why can't God just forgive and let it go?"

At the heart of questions like these, which often come from a sincere heart, lie two fundamental misconceptions. First is the notion that forgiveness means just letting things go. But any of us who have forgiven something substantial know this is not true. If you wreck your friend's car and that friend genuinely forgives you for it, the car does not magically get fixed. There is still a cost to make what is wrong right again. And that cost has to come from somewhere. Either you pay it or your friend pays it.

Second is the belief that God would be better off if He were only a God of love. Many of us have a lopsided view of God. We want God to be loving and kin and compassionately concerned with our lives, without any of this ancient "wrath" business. And yes, He is loving, kind, and near to us. But God is also just. If we ignore that aspect of His character, we create an unhealthy picture of God. It's like a bodybuilder who goes to the gym and only does curls. His biceps would be huge, but all of his other muscles (which matter just as much) would still be tiny. He wouldn't really be a bodybuilder, would he? He would be incomplete. If we only accept the aspects of God we like, we're blinding ourselves to the beauty and fullness of who God really is.

6:8,18. Take a look at verses 8 and 18. Only Noah found favor in God's eyes, right? But then notice how the Bible says that God would establish His covenant not only with Noah, but also with those who belong to him. Watch the progression: Noah received God's favor, was declared righteous, and then his family benefited from his righteousness. The same truth is reiterated in Genesis 7:1: "Then the Lord said to Noah, 'Enter the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this generation.'" Noah found favor. Noah was the only righteous one, yet Noah's family was saved.

99 Essential Doctrines (p. 32, DDG)

God is Gracious

God's nature is to delight in giving unmerited favor to those who are undeserving (Eph. 2:8-9). His grace toward sinners is found most clearly in the salvation He has provided through Christ. Because of sin, humanity is undeserving of salvation—all of us have turned our backs on God, and as a result, we deserve death (Rom. 6:23). However, instead of leaving people in their sins, God has demonstrated His graciousness by providing atonement and forgiveness for our sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus (2 Cor. 5:21).

TEACHING PLAN

Noah is a perfect example of this, though it's easy to miss if you're reading too quickly. Genesis 6:9, after all, says that "Noah was a righteous man, blameless among his contemporaries." Does that mean that he had no sin in his heart? No. In fact, he ended his days in disgrace and nakedness, part of the same evil human race that grieved God's heart so deeply (Gen. 9:20–23).

Since calling Noah "righteous" doesn't mean he did all the right things, what does it mean? The verse before, tells us: Noah "found favor with the LORD" (Gen. 6:8). The word "favor" here means *grace*. God didn't save Noah because he was righteous. Noah became righteous because he received God's offer of salvation. Grace came first. Righteousness followed.

- **Why is it important for us to recognize that God's grace must come before our obedience?**

If we think that obedience comes before grace, or that grace is the reward for being obedient, then we will have a works-based view of Christianity. The author of Hebrews, in remembering Noah, said, "By faith Noah … built an ark to deliver his family. By faith he … became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith" (Heb. 11:7). Only after responding to God's favor and gift of grace with faith is Noah declared "righteous."

That is always the way people become righteous. God grants righteousness, as a gift, to all who will believe and respond in faith. All God asks is that we trust in Him and surrender to Him completely—not partial surrender or a half-hearted commitment, but complete surrender to His grace and mercy. And that surrender is the work of a lifetime.

- **What can we learn from Noah's example of faithfulness?**
- **Living faith means completely surrendering to God. Place students in pairs and allow them to talk about things they can do to surrender every area of their lives to God.**

Read Genesis 9:1,12-15.

As dramatic as the flood was, God knew that it was only temporary. The sin virus remained within the human heart. To fully address the problem of evil, God would have to pursue a different solution.

At the end of this story, God included a clue to indicate this new direction: the rainbow (Gen. 9:13). We associate rainbows with tranquil scenes of peace and stillness; but some have suggested that the word used for "bow" in this passage is the same word for a *war bow*. What God said by placing His bow in the sky was that He was laying down His war bow in the heavens. In fact, if you look at the direction the bow points, you'll notice that it points upward (toward heaven) rather than downward (toward the earth). God would not accomplish His ultimate salvation by shooting the arrows of His wrath into men, but by absorbing them into Himself.

COMMENTARY

Main Point:
God judges sin and provides salvation to those who trust Him.

Genesis 6:8-9; 9:12

There are two truths here we must not miss. First, grace precedes righteousness. It's no accident that the text specifies Noah receiving favor from the Lord before being declared righteous. Grace came first. It wasn't that Noah obeyed and that was why he was saved. Instead, Noah received grace, and that's why he obeyed. The second truth is that the covenant God made with Noah benefited the members of his family. Noah's righteousness was the foundation of the preservation of the rest of his family.

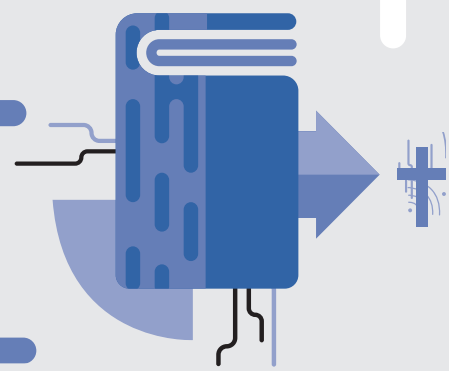
6:8-9. What does a life of faith look like? It is not the initial "yes" that shows you have faith, but the follow-through that verifies you have faith. Hebrews 11:7 doesn't say Noah had faith because he said, "Yes, Lord," but because he endured for a century. The question God asks us about our faith is not, "Did you pray a prayer?" or "Did you get baptized?" or "Did you 'walk the aisle'?" The question is, "Does your life today declare that He is Lord?" or "Are you more surrendered today than yesterday?" It's not what your words say that determines if you have faith; it's what your life says.

9:12. When Noah and his family climbed off the ark, God made a covenant with him and all creation. Creation is anxiously waiting to be restored to its ultimate purpose. And the one thing standing in the way is our sin (Rom. 8:19–21). Even now, creation echoes the glory God intended. As Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God." If you listen, the skies and the seas and the mountains have voices. They are singing to us of God's beauty, power, and creativity, and asking us to join them.

Human sin muffles that voice. That's why one of our jobs as stewards of God's creation is to help it speak clearly. The world isn't trash to be discarded one day when we reach paradise (as in Islam). It's not an illusion or a manifestation of evil (as in Hinduism). The world is the loving creation of God, preaching to us to accept redemption so that it, too, can be what God created it to be. Even in the most dramatic example of judgment in the Old Testament—the flood—we see God reaffirm His plan to bless the earth by filling it with people to worship Him.

(p. 33, DDG) Christ Connection

When you see God's war bow pointed upward, the parallels with Jesus begin to come into focus. Like Noah, Jesus would one day come to be the only righteous man amidst a sea of wickedness. He would obey God, even though no one understood Him. Through His obedience, He would provide an ark of salvation to all who would receive it. But unlike Noah, Jesus would succeed all the way to the end. His life would not end in a drunkenness, but in saying to God, "Not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42).



SIN AND GOD'S GRACE

God judges sin and provides salvation to those who trust Him.

JESUS CONNECTION

Like Noah, Jesus would one day be the only righteous man found on the earth. Through His obedience, He would provide an ark of salvation to all who would receive it. But unlike Noah, Jesus would succeed all the way to the end in saying to God, "Not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42).

LIFEWISE QUALITY

CONFIDENCE – Full trust and assurance in the reliability of a person or thing.

HEAD

Having confidence in God is what the Bible calls *faith*. What are some specific ways Noah showed confidence in God? What blessings or benefits did Noah receive as a result of his faith put into action?

Confidence is depending on the strength, resources or wisdom we believe will best get us through. What does it look like to show confidence in ourselves, in others or in God? Is it okay to have confidence in ourselves? In others? Why is having confidence in God the best idea?

HEART

How might our relationships with others look different if we lived each day remembering that, in Jesus, God freely shows us mercy and love instead of judgment?

What qualities does God reveal about Himself in Noah's story (for example, mercy, grace, power, etc.)? Why would those qualities help us have confidence in Him in our hard times?

HANDS

Think of a difficult situation you are dealing with right now. Are you putting your confidence in yourself, in others or in God? How do you know?

Just as Noah spent his life in faith building an ark while the world rejected his message (Heb. 11:7; 2 Pet. 2:5), we can have confidence in God because He is perfectly powerful, gracious, good, and merciful. He will never fail us. But other people can and do fail us, and we will have to deal with our own failures, too. How should we respond when someone we put our confidence in lets us down? What about when we fail or let ourselves down?